

Book reviews

Stuart: A Life Backwards. Alexander Masters, Perennial, 2005, ISBN 0-00-720037-4

This book is the story of a remarkable friendship between a Cambridge writer and illustrator Alexander Masters and Stuart a homeless polydrug addict with a borderline personality disorder. They meet whilst Stuart is begging outside Sydney Sussex College and they become involved in a campaign to release two charity workers from prison.

The biography is told backwards and the reasons for his behaviour slowly unfold, particularly his unusual medical diagnosis and teenage experiences. It is well written with humour and quirky illustrations by the author. It swings from despair to compassion and is full of surprises.

Forensic Physicians frequently meet patients like Stuart in custody suites, prison and general practice. I feel we can achieve a better understanding of the attraction of drugs and alcohol when reading books written by self confessed addicts. Take this opportunity to learn more about forensic psychiatry, substance misuse, prison life, street slang and court appearances from the defendants point of view.

It is an instructive, powerful and humane book.

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Saukko, P. Knight, B. Arnold, Knight's Forensic Pathology, third ed., Arnold, London, 2004, ISBN 0340760443

Knight's Forensic Pathology remains one of the leading texts in its field and will have appeal to not only practising forensic pathologists and forensic medical examiners, but also to general histopathologists, histopathology trainees and physicians in emergency medicine.

In both hospital and coronial post mortems, the pathologist must always be aware of any unnatural cause of death. There are numerous signs which may raise suspicion which are well described and illustrated within this text, for example particular types of scars and demarcations as well as elucidating the natural and unnatural causes of asphyxia. The general histopathologist will sometimes perform autopsies on cases where no cause of death is found at post mortem but poisoning is discovered on routine toxicology examination. There are chapters which extensively document the various types of toxins with the effects they may produce, how long they remain in the circulation and the metabolism. The analysis of the toxicology report is also included with reference to avoiding over-interpretation. The text on obtaining samples at autopsy is exhaustive and well written.

Paediatric pathologists may find the chapter on stillbirth and sudden death in infancy useful however, the new literature on the management of SUDI including reference to

the post-mortem protocol, and the integrated role of the pathologist may need including in future editions.

Histopathology trainees have limited exposure to forensic pathology therefore this text provides an excellent overview of the subject. The post mortem currently comprises a significant part of the part two MRCPPath exam and this book is useful in that it also illustrates some of the more common natural causes of sudden death. The chapter on performing an autopsy provides a useful guide on dissection techniques with particular detail on examination of the heart which often causes much controversy amongst trainees! The section on the external examination is also worth consideration for the generalist. There are extensive descriptions since this often reveals many major clues, particularly in the forensic setting and this should not be overlooked in the hospital autopsy. Writing a report of the autopsy findings can often be challenging to a trainee when starting in histopathology. The description with a useful bullet point list of what to include is invaluable.

Doctors practising emergency medicine may well find the chapters on gun shot wounds and child abuse particularly useful since occasionally such cases appear with an elusive history. The text on gun shot wounds is extensive with superb diagrams on the trajectory of bullets on penetration, as well as good descriptions on the varying types of injury caused by the firearm and missile.